



Chartering a Bus or Coach in NSW

Getting Value for Money and
What to Look For

Introduction

When chartering a bus or coach in New South Wales value for money includes quality, safety, service and back up, not just price.

These guidelines will assist individuals and organisations who are considering chartering a bus or coach for a day trip or an extended tour.

Bus travel is one of the safest ways to travel in New South Wales. Government Transport authorities and the Bus and Coach Association (NSW) have worked together to establish a set of rules for the bus industry.

Understanding these rules will help you make your next chartered bus or coach trip as safe, comfortable and enjoyable as possible.

This guide explains the current rules and standards that charter bus and coach services in New South Wales must meet. It outlines important travel details required by the bus or coach operator so that, together, you can plan a successful and safe trip. It also answers frequently asked questions about bus and coach charter.

There are a small minority of bus and coach operators who are not properly accredited or who have drivers who are not correctly licenced or authorised to drive public passenger vehicles. It is important that you identify these operators and avoid using their services.

Current Rules and Standards

❖ What is a charter bus or charter service?

A *charter bus or coach service* is a public passenger service in which a bus and the driver are pre-booked to take passengers for an agreed fee, but only if:

- the hirer is entitled to determine the route and the time of travel, and
- all passengers' journeys have a common origin or a common destination (or both), and
- individual fares are not payable by the passengers (but rather a "group" fee is charged) and
- the service does not operate according to a regular route and timetable.

❖ Who can provide a charter bus or coach service for your group?

In New South Wales, any operator who holds a NSW Ministry of Transport *Operator Accreditation for Long Distance, Tourist and Charter Services* is allowed to tender for your charter if you ask them to do so. Your local bus and/or coach operator may offer charter services for your group but they do not have an exclusive right to provide these services.

To obtain an accreditation with the Ministry of Transport the operator must:

- show evidence they are of good repute
- demonstrate they are a fit and proper person to carry out a bus or coach service
- be competent to carry out that service
- be financially capable of carrying out the service
- have access to maintenance facilities for vehicles

Under the Bus Operator Accreditation System (BOAS) operators must have a Management Information System (e.g. driver register), a Safety Management System, a Drug and Alcohol Program, and a Vehicle Maintenance Management System.

Operators must display details of their accreditation on the front nearside or offside panel of the bus or coach.

Operators are issued with an Operator Accreditation Certificate by the NSW Ministry of Transport and can provide a copy to you if requested.

❖ Who can drive the charter bus or coach?

Under the NSW Passenger Transport Act, 1990, a driver of a Public Passenger Vehicle must hold a Drivers Authority, which has been issued by the Director General of the NSW Ministry of Transport. A Drivers Authority means that a person has been assessed by the Ministry as being fit and proper to drive a public passenger vehicle, which includes an assessment of their medical fitness.

Drivers must also comply with strict regulations regarding drug and alcohol, and fatigue management. This ensures the highest standards of safety as fatigue is a major factor in road accidents. Repeat the bit about displaying the card

You should be aware that if a school teacher, relative or friend drives a bus or coach hired from a rental company it is not considered a charter service. This means that the driver would not necessarily have a Driver Authorisation, comply with fatigue, drug or alcohol regulations, or that the bus or coach would meet Public Transport Standards.

Planning a Successful and Safe Trip

How do I get started?

Before you contact a bus or coach operator, you need to work out some basic details about your proposed trip. Use the following questions to put together the information the operator will need. Make sure to tell the operator if any of this information changes after you make your booking (e.g. if passenger numbers increase or decrease).

① Where & when do you want to go?

Decide your proposed destination and when you want to travel. This will determine the minimum requirements of the bus or coach.

② How many passengers will be travelling?

Try to get a firm indication of the number of passengers travelling as early as possible. This will determine the bus or coach size or the number of vehicles required for the trip.

For extended trips a list of passenger names with contact details should be supplied to the operator prior to the commencement of the journey wherever possible.

Bus or coach operators must stay within legal load limits set for their particular bus or coach. You can help ensure compliance with the limits by providing accurate numbers of passengers to the operator.

③ What is the trip itinerary?

Plan your trip with a realistic itinerary which takes into account the needs of your group and the requirements of the bus or coach operator.

Decide how many hours or days the trip will take and the daily start and finish times. Be specific about times, keeping in mind rest stops, meal breaks, and any side trips. Whilst there are no restrictions on the distance travelled in one day there are restrictions on how many *hours* a bus or coach driver can drive in one day.

A professional bus or coach operator is happy to provide assistance in ensuring that your proposed itinerary meets the regulations.

④ How much luggage will be taken?

Advise the bus or coach operator the amount and type of luggage (e.g. bags, sporting equipment, tents) you will be carrying, to ensure it will be stored safely and efficiently.

Bulky luggage should be stored in the luggage compartment under the bus or coach or in luggage trailers. Any hand luggage that you take on to the bus or coach with you should be stored securely in the overhead luggage racks, under the seat directly in front of you, or in any other suitable space designated for luggage.

⑤ What features do you require?

When requesting a quotation you should advise the operator if you require any of the following features:

- Air-conditioning
- Coach seats (reclining)
- PA System
- Seat belts
- Television/Video
- Toilet
- Wheelchair accessibility
- Bookings for accommodation or attractions.

Frequently Asked Questions

① What is the maximum age for buses and coaches in NSW?

In New South Wales there is no maximum age for buses and coaches used for charter services. However, operators with vehicles that also perform contract services (e.g. school runs) for the NSW Ministry of Transport must have an average age of 12 years.

It is important to ask the operator what the age of the vehicle intended for your charter is in order to gauge the vehicle's suitability for the job.

② Are seat belts compulsory?

Coaches manufactured after 1 July 1994 and designed for long-distance travel (with seats greater than 100cm high) must be equipped with seat belts for all occupants. It is not compulsory for buses to have seat belts.

When planning a charter you should advise the operator if you require a vehicle with seat belts.

All passengers are required to wear the seatbelts in coaches, and, where fitted, in buses.

③ Are buses or coaches equipped for Wheelchairs?

Charter bus or coach services (where conveyance is a targeted group of individuals) are not required to comply with the

Commonwealth Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Guidelines 2004.

However, there are a number of bus and coach operators that are equipped and licenced to carry wheelchairs.

It is important that you specify any requirement for a wheelchair accessible vehicle when requesting a quotation from an operator.

④ How do I know if an operator is experienced?

How long an operator has been in business generally provides a good indication of their experience. If you do not know anyone who has previously used the operator's services you may request that the operator provide details of a current customer who you may contact for a reference.

Speaking with other groups who have chartered a bus or coach from a particular operator is a good way to gauge their suitability for your day trip or extended tour.

⑤ Do buses and coaches have an independent safety check?

All buses and coaches in NSW undergo an inspection every six months by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) as part of the Heavy Vehicle Inspection Scheme (HVIS).

In addition, they may be tested at temporary or permanent road side heavy vehicle inspection stations and or weighbridges.

⑥ Can all bus or coach operators book tour packages?

Bus or coach operators who take bookings for attractions or accommodation packages should be licensed travel agents. You can check whether your bus or coach operator is a licensed travel agent by checking with the NSW Department of Fair Trading. This ensures that all monies held on your groups behalf are kept in a trust account which is audited every year.

⑦ Can all bus or coach operators travel to national parks?

Bus or coach operators who take passengers to national parks should be licensed tour or charter operators with NSW National Parks. This ensures passengers are protected by adequate safety standards and public liability insurance whilst enjoying their time in national parks.

⑧ Are all bus and coach operators' members of the Bus & Coach Association (NSW)?

No.

Approximately 700 bus and/or coach operators are members of the Bus & Coach Association NSW (BCA). The BCA works with all members to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and all accreditation conditions.

Members of the BCA have a genuine interest in the provision of professional services to the public and improving standards across the industry.

To find out if an operator is a member of the Bus & Coach Association (NSW) you can contact the BCA on (02) 8839 9500

⑨ How much can I expect to pay for a charter bus or coach?

Where possible, you should get quotes from a number of bus or coach operators. Ask them to supply details of the bus or coach and its features with the quote.

You can generally expect to pay more for additional features such as seat belts, air-conditioning, toilets, coach seating, travel agency services, such as booking attractions and services on your behalf and some vehicle types and sizes.

Remember, you get what you pay for.

It is important to work with the bus or coach operator so that, together, you can charter a bus or coach with suitable comfort and safety features for your trip.

⑩ What should I consider when requesting a quote for a charter?

The following checklist should be used as a guide:

- Is the operator accredited by the NSW Ministry of Transport?
- Does the operator have experience in providing the charter service required?
- Is the driver/s licenced and authorised to drive a public passenger vehicle?
- Is the vehicle of an age and standard that is suitable for your trip?
- Does the vehicle have the features required by your group e.g. Luggage capacity, seat belts, toilet etc.
- Does the itinerary allow the driver to comply with National Driving Hours Regulations?
- Does the operator have a back up procedure in the case of a break down?



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